

THE
DAVIS FOUNDATION
FOR PROVIDING
EMOTIONAL COMFORT

Letter of September 22, 2004

Dear Reader,

Everyone has a conception of his or her ideal self. Some strive to attain it. Others, feeling that it is totally out of reach, just daydream about it. Still others aren't even aware of its existence. How does this concept arise?

From birth onward, we all strive to maintain an optimal stimulus level. As we develop, we imitate and incorporate behaviors that we have seen that will help end disequilibrations and restore comfort. And we learn that doing things for ourselves when possible, rather than having to wait for help, will restore comfort more quickly and fully. We strive to attain competence and autonomy.

When we are comfortable, we require new input in order to maintain an optimal level of stimulation. These new stimuli may consist of intensification of previous stimuli or elaborations of them. A child may ask for more coloring books and a larger box of crayons with more colors. New input may also consist of novel stimuli that originate through the creative process. Creation occurs when the mental apparatus accesses a previously unconnected associative pathway in response to a stimulus. The child may begin to use the crayons as logs to build a cabin.

Small children view their parents as competent, powerful, and knowledgeable, and realize that these qualities are desirable because they help them achieve their goals. Children learn that kindness and love are good qualities because they experience the benefit when these are bestowed on them. They learn that honesty is desirable because they feel hurt when they are lied to or cheated. They also learn that, although they may not like certain limits that are set on them or pleasures denied them, these actions, too, can restore comfort. A child who is overstimulated or overindulged needs assistance in regaining an optimal comfort level. And so with other qualities: children learn those that are desirable by experiencing their effects.

As a child is well treated, the accompanying feelings of comfort and pleasure form their own mental pathways. When the child then behaves in these ways himself, he again experiences the associatively related feelings and, in fact, feels them more powerfully because he perceives both his own pleasure and that of his recipient. Giving is even more pleasurable than receiving, but only when the giver already has what he needs.

A person's concept of his ideal self is formed by identifying with all of the positive attributes that he observes in others and experiences at their hands, because all of these characteristics will be beneficial for him to have and to use. Some negative traits may appear to a child to serve a useful purpose, and he may adopt them for that reason. It may appear to him that bullying, lying, or stealing will get him what he wants but, out of awareness, these qualities are associatively related to mental pathways of negative



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feelings laid down when he was the recipient of these kinds of treatment. These traits, therefore, do not contribute to the image of an ideal self.

The more a person can approach realizing her ideal self, the more comfort and pleasure she will feel. She will be most able to maintain an optimal stimulus level and when overstimulated experience positive, rather than negative, feelings. But what sorts of things interfere with attaining this condition?

To the extent that she is not treated optimally, her mind will generate *partial* and *false solutions* that will not fully eliminate the disequilibrations that evoke them, and which will form habit patterns that interfere with ideal behaviors. If she is insufficiently loved and understood by her parents, she will feel anxiety, anger, and depression. She may develop greed, masochistic self-denial, or inhibition of assertiveness. One who is overindulged will not learn self-discipline. She may act out in an attempt to elicit boundaries. One who is abused may identify with the abuser. When disequilibrium becomes extreme, a person will block out awareness of it or create an alternative reality. To deal with the distress that these traits and symptoms create, people develop additional partial and false solutions, non-specific tension reducers such as over-eating, excessive focus on one activity, or blanket denial of threats. The sources of discomfort are many and so are the responses to them.

These partial and false solutions become habit patterns that cannot be changed in the absence of complex stimuli. A woman who is greedy cannot be giving. One who is spoiled will not respect others' boundaries. One who has become an abuser offers pain rather than assistance. Individuals with these characteristics are not aware of the ideal self that exists out of awareness. One who gives masochistically rather than as an overflow of her own good feelings continues to feel disequibrated and this uncomfortable feeling is transmitted to the recipient as well as distressing the giver. A person who feels anxiety, depression, or anger may be aware of an ideal but feel unable to strive for it.

Our Inner Guides, by solving our disequilibrations with *true solutions*, allow us to actualize our ideal selves. And we don't even have to strive for this. It happens naturally.

QUESTION:

Can my Inner Guide take over in ways that I don't want him to?

ANSWER:

No. By definition, he exists to increase your comfort.

I welcome your questions and comments, and will publish as many of them as possible. I look forward to hearing from you, either by post or at info@davis-foundation.org. If you would like to be anonymous, just let me know.

Cordially,

Judith M. Davis

Volume 2 Number 19

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